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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
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INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 005230

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DEPT FOR EAP/MLS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/17/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: SOUTHERN VIOLENCE: UPDATED VIOLENCE STATISTICS

REF: BANGKOK 001134 (SOUTHERN VIOLENCE: CRUNCHING THE
NUMBERS)

Classified By: Political Counselor Susan M. Sutton. Reason 1.4 (B,D)

¶1. (C) Summary. Our analysis of newly available statistics suggests that the violence in the first half of 2006 continued to ebb and spike at levels consistent with 2004 and 2005, possibly with a slight downward trend. The frequency of bomb attacks may be increasing by a small amount, but shooting attacks remain the most prevalent form of violence in the deep South. New information from southern police statistics seems to undercount the number of incidents in 2004, but provides a useful trend line for understanding the dynamic of violence in Thailand's three southernmost provinces in 2005 and 2006. In particular, this information supports our assessment that province-wide attacks like the multiple bombings in June 2005, October 2005 and June 2006 do not result in a significant increase in deaths or injuries, although they do garner much attention. Overall, the lethality of insurgent attacks has not changed significantly; data suggests that the number of victims per month may be declining. Finally, civilians--whether operating in a government capacity or as private citizens--remain those most likely to be effected by violence. Approximately 78 percent of victims in the deep South this year are civilians. End Summary.

NEW SETS OF STATISTICS ON OVERALL VIOLENCE

¶2. (C) Reftel outlined our attempt to provide some quantitative measure to the violence in Thailand's deep South. Based upon our review of a limited pool of comprehensive statistics, we found the information supplied by Dr. Sisomphop of Prince of Songkhla University (PSU) to be the most reliable and well sourced data available. According to this set of statistics (hereafter referred to as the PSU data) we argued that, contrary to conventional wisdom, the level of violence had not sharply increased in 2005 from the year prior, but had remained in the same general range and was characterized by dynamic spikes and ebbs.

¶3. (C) Since that cable, we have received updated PSU data, and new information compiled by the British Embassy in Bangkok, based upon statistics from Police Region IX forward command in Yala. At first glance, this data suggests that the frequency of violence in 2005 was significantly higher than the year before. The UK data reports 975 incidents or attacks in 2004 and 2084 occurrences in 2005. The PSU data, however, lists 1843 incidents in 2004 and 1703 incidents in

12005.

14. (C) While the PSU data is based partially on police reports, press information and Dr. Sisomphop's field research, the UK information is wholly derived from Police Region IX statistics. Neither should be considered 100 percent accurate, but for the purpose of understanding trends in the violence over the past two years, the PSU data appears to be more reflective of reality. When plotted together on a month-to-month timeline, the PSU and UK information varies in a striking--and uniform--manner. Both data sets reflect similar dynamics (i.e. increases in attacks during April 2004, decreases in December 2005), but the number of insurgent-related incidents reported by police are consistently lower than that reported by PSU from January 2004 until April 2005. After this point, the number of incidents reported by police is always higher than the number reported by the PSU study.

15. (C) Recall that, following the upsurge in insurgent violence in southern Thailand in 2004, government officials spent most of that year (and some of 2005) denying that there was, in fact, an insurgency in the South. Officials from the Prime Minister on down blamed the rise in violence on local criminals, smugglers and drug kingpins. By 2005, the government began to acknowledge that there was indeed a resurgent separatist movement active in the three southern provinces. Therefore, we believe that official statistics from 2004--like the UK information--likely undercounted the number of insurgent-related incidents--instead labeling them as "normal" crime--because official policy dictated that there was no new major separatist campaign. Casualty figures from the attack on the Kru Se mosque and the demonstration at Tak Bai were not included in the UK information, further lowering 2004 totals. Further muddying the picture, official

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statistics from late-2005 and 2006 may be slightly inflated. Anecdotal reporting from some of our contacts in the police and academia suggests that some "normal" crime is now being characterized as insurgent-related, given the monetary rewards now available to victims of separatist violence. Characterizing these incidents as insurgent attacks also gives the police an excuse for not solving them.

ATTACKS IN 2006

16. (C) In an attempt to discern some--albeit loose--trends, we compared the average number of attacks reported in each data set for 2006, with the monthly average from each separate set of statistics from 2004 and 2005. According to the PSU information, an average of 153 attacks occurred per month in 2004, 140 per month in 2005 and 63--so far--per month as of May 2006. The British data suggests that 2004 saw a monthly average of 81 attacks, 2005 saw an average of 173 attacks and 2006 is averaging out at 163 attacks per month. According to the UK information, the first half of 2005 was more violent than the same period in 2006, with 1082 attacks in the first six months of 2005 and only 894 attacks in the first half of 2006. The PSU data only covers January through May, with 79 (Jan), 74 (Feb), 97 (March), 52 (April) and 15 (May) incidents respectively. The UK's police-derived data ends in June, with 203 (Jan), 117 (Feb), 182 (March), 116 (April), 109 (May), and 167 (June) incidents reported.

ATTACK TYPE

17. (C) The UK police-derived data is one of the few sets that breaks down attacks by type for 2006, offering some rough insights into trends. The information confirms our earlier assessment that shooting attacks remain the most prevalent form of violence but the number of bombings are slightly rising. According to the UK data, in 2005 there was a monthly average of 76 shootings and 20 bombings. For the

first half of 2006, there was an average of 76 shootings and 25 bombings. The average number of bombings per month in 2006 is slightly skewed, however, by a flurry of bomb attacks on June 15. The monthly breakdown of bombings is: eight (January), 14 (February), 18 (March), 19 (April), 14 (May) and 76 (June).

WIDESPREAD ATTACKS CONTINUE

¶18. (C) Single-day spikes in violence, like the rash of attacks across all three provinces on June 15, often garner significant press attention and lead to speculation that the insurgency is growing in intensity. The data does not support this assertion, however. Historically, province-wide attacks every few months have been the norm since 2004. In that year, there were over 36 arson attacks on March 18, a series of approximately 80 arson, bombing and shooting attacks April 22-23, and almost a dozen bombs on August 3-5. In 2005, there were widespread attacks April 13, a sharp surge in shooting attacks in June (the UK data lists a total of 329 attacks, though this may be inflated), and at least 18 separate arson, bomb and shooting incidents on July 14. Almost 50 coordinated attacks occurred across the three southern provinces in October, followed by another spike in attacks on November 7, 2005 and January 18, 2006.

¶19. (C) More significantly, these coordinated upsurges in violence do not result in a comparable increase in casualties. According to both the UK and PSU data, the monthly rate of deaths and injuries does not correspond with the number of attacks. When graphed out over time, the number of attacks per month presents a dynamic trend of ebbs and spikes, while the number of deaths and injuries remains in the same range. This makes sense to us, given that many of the incidents reported during single-day surges in violence are simple arson attacks, vandalism, small firecracker-like explosions and the use of metal spikes on public roads. According to the UK data, the combined number of victims (deaths plus injuries) for 2005 was 1,669, providing a monthly average of 139 victims. For the first six months of 2006, the monthly average is 134, based on a total of 809 victims as of July 1. By comparison, the monthly victim average for the first half of 2005 was 142.

¶10. (C) Dr. Sisomphop's PSU data, while only covering the period until May 2006, also supports the contention that single-day spikes in coordinated violence does not lead to

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comparable increases in deaths and injuries. The PSU information, however, portrays a decline in the number of victims from 2005 to 2006. According to this data set, there were a total of 1,466 victims in 2004, 1,510 in 2005 and 452 for the first five months of 2006, yielding monthly averages of 122, 126 and 90.4, respectively. Taken separately, the first five months of 2005 averaged 138 victims per month, far higher than the same period in 2006.

WHO ARE THE VICTIMS?

¶11. (C) Neither the PSU nor UK police-derived information for 2006 breaks down victim totals by religion or government affiliation. A separate, publicly released report by the Region IX police, however, reveals that the overwhelming majority of victims in the South remain civilians. This information unfortunately does not provide 2004 and 2005 statistic for comparison. According to this report, which covers January until the first week of August 2006, 31 police, 11 soldiers and 322 civilians have died in insurgent-related violence during this period. (Note. This report does not delineate between civilians serving in an official capacity such as Interior Ministry officials, school teachers and non-government private citizens. End Note.) Eighty-one police, 80 soldiers and 424 civilians were

injured. In total, 78 percent of victims were civilians.
BOYCE